Natural Environments Leadership Team Meeting
May 2, 2006

Participants:	Kevin Bernadt. KCDDD Board
	Jon Botten, Children's Therapy Center
	Jane Campbell, King County DDD
	Jane Dobrovolny, Northwest Center
	Sandy Duncan, CHAP
	Lisa Greenwald, Kindering Center
	Betsy McAlister, King County Parent Coalition
	Susan Sandall, UW-EEU
	Magan Scoggins, Encompass
	Katie Vornbrock, Hearing Speech & Deafness
	Jan Wrathall, King County DDD
Minutes:	Elaine Goddard, King County DDD
Facilitator:	David Wertheimer, Kelly Point Partners

Jane introduced David Wertheimer who will be the group facilitator. David is a former colleague in the King County Community and Human Services Department. He is now self-employed as a consultant, and does facilitation with human services-related groups. His role will be to help this group establish goals and keep the process moving forward. He started with an introductory exercise.

David asked Jan and Jane to review the group's mandate: What is this group being asked to do? Jan responded that the group is being asked to provide guidance to the County and provide leadership and assistance to implement natural environments. The County is tasked over the next 6-12 months to move to meet the natural environments requirement, and there is some disagreement within the community of what that means. Jane added that the County does not want to dictate what providers do, but rather they want to bring in every facet of the DD system, representing all groups, and find ways to implement natural environments and provide guidance that builds from the various perspectives and utilizes best practices.

The group agreed to: Over the next few months, identify and recommend what the County could/should do to promote and implement natural environments. This may include:
- Defining and clarifying what it means to provide services in natural environments;
- Recommending technical assistance, outside experts, and training opportunities;
- Identifying evidence based practices;
- Looking at contract structure;
- Determining what help agencies need to implement necessary changes.

Which constituencies will be affected by a change in process that moves the system towards services in natural environments?

- Administrators who are budget focused may not be receptive. Some agencies provide 95% of their services in-house.
- Clinicians - Some in the group think clinicians are ready, but others think many are not ready to change practices.
- Parents and families - Parents may expect therapist services to be provided at the service center location. They may feel they will miss opportunities to network with other parents, professionals, and the community. Families may get conflicting explanations as to what is best.
- Medical community – They may be set in existing practices, and not supporting natural environments.
- Some community members who do referrals (e.g., child-care center, grandparent, public health nurse, etc.) may not understand natural environments.
- Boards of directors – These groups are responsible for the mission and articles of incorporation of the organization they serve and are charged with sustaining organizational wellbeing. Many organizations were set up to do business as is and may be reluctant to change.
- Funders – Financial pressure from some funders is to keep services clinical. Funders include Part C, DDD, school districts, Medicaid, insurance, United Way, charitable donations, parent co-pays, cities, Headstart. The requirement for natural environments comes from Part C, DDD, and school district funding, but is a goal not necessarily shared by other funding sources.
- Children – Children are not involved in decisions, but vote through their participation and the outcomes of that participation. Services should make them happier, learning more, and better connected to the community. Ultimately, children have to make acceptable progress toward federal outcomes.

What barriers/challenges will be encountered?

- Pride – Current program successes, i.e., what programs do and have accomplished in the past. Organizations that consider themselves successful don't appreciate being told their practices may be wrong or not aligned with new goals and directions.
- Skepticism – Research on natural environments is not unequivocal. Evidence based practices can be challenged. Are natural environments practices well established and supported by research or are results modest? Are natural environments just the current fad?
- Confusion between implementing natural environments (where) and identifying evidence based practices (how).
- Lack of clarity – Definition is coming through multiple filters (Federal/ State/ County/ Providers). Need understanding of what expectations are for natural environments, how will we know when we get there? There is concern that we'll be audited, and will not pass due to misunderstanding. We need to identify within our practices how to apply the State and Federal definitions.

The group agreed that the first step is to come to a shared understanding and develop a definition that will explain the principles and practices of Natural Environments.

- Need to know what all the "filters" are through which natural environments must be understood.
- Definition needs to be acceptable to State and Feds.
- Must accept that some providers may not continue to contract with the county over this issue. Any time change happens some don't choose to come along, but providers need enough information to make a clear decision whether to stay or go.

The group reviewed 34 CFR 303.18 + 303.12b which states:

"Natural Environments are settings that are natural or normal for the child's age peers who have no disabilities, including the home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate"

All agreed that this is a vague statute and that the details are problematic. This group needs to fill-in the blanks to define what this means for practice in King County. The team can recommend a definition, but does not have authority to enforce it. The County will need to be able to defend it to ITEIP, and ITEIP will have to be able to defend it to the Feds.

In order to streamline the process, the group agreed to have the county write a preliminary draft definition of natural environments and then work together to refine it and create a definition that all are comfortable with. The final definition will need to include how and where services are practiced. It must include practical steps. This will be accomplished in two phases:

Phase 1 – Define Natural Environments
- "Where" is a natural environment?
- "How" - Principles that guide how to do it, not specific or prescriptive. This will include identifying evidence based practices that are congruent with the principles.

Phase 2 – Develop strategies for making "IT" happen and determining a strategic and tactical plan.

During this process the group needs to have discussions with stakeholders to keep them informed of developments. There is an obligation to keep all agencies in the loop.

Next meeting homework for County staff: The County is asked to provide the following for the group to review by 5/12:

1. All available "filters" used to describe natural environments
2. A preliminary draft of the "where" piece definition of natural environments.
3. Proposed timeline for implementation of change as a guide to EILT service development.
4. 1 page matrix showing authority – What is County's authority? Who has the power to make and/or enforce the shift towards natural environments?
5. Share previous efforts to do this work, including lessons learned from previous processes. Jan has some documents she can share.

The group hopes to wrap up by the end of July, meeting every 2 weeks for approximately 2 – 2.5 hours. Elaine will coordinate the schedule.

The next meeting will be May 15 from 1:30 – 4:00 pm at Region 4, Lunchroom A.

The agenda will include:
- Beginning to define the principles of Natural Environments.
- How to structure getting input from others.

Susan passed out several articles on evidence-based practices for members to read.